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## INTRODUCTION: CRISIS AND THE IM/POSSIBILITY OF THOUGHT

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We do not so much write *about* crisis as write *from* crisis. “Crisis” has become a ubiquitous shorthand for the *apparently* unsolvable: the disruptions of human-driven climate change, the displacement of millions of migrants and refugees, the decay of representational institutions and the rise of populism and demagogues, the ongoing debacle of carnage in Syria, and the reverberations of “the 2008 global financial crisis” (as if there was something particular to 2008!) as license for so-called austerity measures. But to describe these particular situations, each with its own particular history, as demonstrating some general category of ‘crisis’ is to perpetuate a narrative structure that is far from neutral or disinterested. There is a long history of the production and mobilization of crisis—a ‘shock doctrine’, as Naomi Klein (2007) diagnosed so influentially. Such a production is material, involving the slow or sudden emergence of a set of disruptive (and frequently unliveable) circumstances. But perhaps just as importantly, it is discursive: deploying ‘crisis’ as a description of those circumstances justifies interventions by interested parties, which are often interventions whose plans precede the crisis itself. As Klein puts it, ‘crisis *works*’ (155ff, emphasis added)—that is, the label of “crisis” is not just descriptive but performative, producing helplessness, legitimating a particular response, and pre-emptively negating the possibility of critical thought.

A version of the Klein's thesis affected the circumstances of our production of this very collection: at the end of 2017, declaring a "pensions crisis", university employers in the UK proposed cuts to employer contributions and employee benefits; but the so-called crisis was based on questionable calculations, and the move was widely understood as symptomatic of the ongoing financialization of the higher education sector. In an unprecedented response, members of the Universities and Colleges Union (UCU) at 65 universities took part in the largest industrial action in the history of UK higher education (Weale and Topping 2018). Withholding their academic labour and joining each other on picket lines, they found solidarity amongst bitter winter conditions over several weeks in February. Many of our authors and reviewers are based in the UK, so this edition has been somewhat delayed by these actions and their aftermath: a marked reminder that crisis is not just an object of study, but part of the conditions from which we work.

And in this committed mobilisation of our colleagues—as they rejected the terms that were being offered, forced new agreements, and turned the focus back onto the marketization of the university as cause rather than solution to this crisis—we can also see that the structure of crisis in fact contains the possibility for the very thing it is designed to foreclose: critical thought. Our colleague, Eve Katsouraki, with whom we began work on this special edition, made exactly this point in calling attention to the etymology of the word: in its earliest usage, *krisis* (κρίσις) referred to the judgement passed within the Athenian theatre by audiences and designated judges, i.e. critics (κριταί). Eve reminded us that this theatrical judgement served as a prototype of the democratic paradigm for Plato—albeit one that he ultimately condemns for being based on aesthetic sensibilities, at odds with the superior mental work of philosophy. But this root connection between crisis and critique, and between performance and philosophy, is one that persists: in the 1930s, Bertolt Brecht and Walter Benjamin planned to launch a journal called *Krisis und Kritik*, and in their different ways each imagined the role that aesthetic "shock" might play in exposing the discontinuity of history, in imagining things a different way—perhaps an alternative kind of 'shock doctrine'.

For Benjamin, "crisis" was synonymous with modernity and capitalism. There was, he believed, no discreet time called crisis; rather, crisis was the mediality of the 19th century, and the goal to overcome the permanent state of crisis was to be achieved through philosophical reflection from within the immanent field of the crisis itself. Now, in its neoliberal definition, 'crisis' is ontologically linked with the increasingly complex, globalized world dominated by manufactured risk and perpetuated failure. As the historical sociologist Greta Krippner (2011) claims, the present crisis is another stage in the long, drawn-out departure of capitalist democracies that performs one fundamental act—financialization—that is, 'the tendency for profit making in the economy to occur increasingly through financial channels rather than through productive activities' (4).

Again, we have no independent place from which to critique these circumstances. And PING! Just as we are writing this introduction, one of us gets an email from the *Chronicle of Higher Education* with the subject line: 'How the job crisis has transformed faculty hiring.' This serendipitous arrival sparks a memory of recent headlines bedecked with "crisis". Walking into the grocery store a few weeks ago, Will reads the headline, 'Crisis at the Border'—a reference to the Mexican border and

the Trump-driven detainment of children in cages, but one that could apply equally to so many borders at the moment, from the Northern border of the African continent that abuts the Mediterranean Sea to the border between analytic and continental academic philosophy. If you search Google News for the keyword “crisis” you’ll find at least a dozen headlines from major news outlets decrying various crises each day, from the Turkish response to Western sanctions to the impending hurricane season in the United States, to the ongoing sexual abuse of children by Catholic priests and the political turmoil of countries as geographically separate as Venezuela and Yemen. What can we do to think outside of this crisis echo chamber? In other words, what type of thought is possible within crisis? If crisis extends to thought itself, insofar as we find ourselves in a crisis of thought (i.e., the crisis of not being able to think beyond the crisis of thought), then what kind of thinking is possible anymore?

Answer: we must supply critical thought with creative thought in order to avoid discursive lines of flight already mapped out and monitored by the technicians of crisis. To see such a model in action, we can return to the Ancient Greek word of *krisis* with Anne Carson as our guide:

... I like the word *Krisis* which Sokrates taught me.  
It means Decision.

Ruling (of a court). Middle (of the spinal column).  
Our first shot

is Sokrates tapping the sleep spine—out pours his own dream:  
a woman

in white who spoke to him in his sleep. *Krisis* means  
the crack that runs

between Sokrates sitting on the edge of his bunk telling us Death is  
No Misfortune

and his soul making little twitchy moves against the flesh,  
which show up

on the film as bright dots or phosphorescence before  
storms....

(Carson 1998)

This is a neo-baroque rendering of a classical scene. We can work backward through the excerpt to produce meaning. Sokrates’ bright and shiny soul over-exposes the film that is recording the scene and produces white spots that double (accidentally?) as metaphors for Truth’s white-hot light. Before reaching the surface of the film, Sokrates’ soul must escape its body, which it will shortly do once Sokrates is dispatched from the mortal realm. (We are not, however, to worry about this immanent death: Death is No Misfortune.) All of this, this classical scene of philosophical revelation, is transmitted not through docudrama or biographical narrative structures but, rather, through dream sequence. We are witnessing a televisual dream sequence, and it through this

conceit that Carson weaves into the poem her knowledge of a long-lost definition of *krisis*: the interpretation of dreams or portents (Liddell and Scott).

As she is apt to do, Carson takes it one step further. *Krisis* also referred to the middle of the spinal column, and this dramaturgical knowledge of the word's various significances allows for the graphic spinal tap that instigates the dream imagery. Ultimately, *krisis* is limited neither to dream interpretation nor the middle of the spinal column, nor even to the act of decision; rather, Carson renders *krisis* as the confluence of the body, the critical-intellectual apparatus, the divinatory powers of the clairvoyant, and the scene of spectatorship. *Krisis* means the 'crack that runs between [...]', the crack that somehow divides and sutures the multiple nodes of the event of meaning-making. Poetry is Carson's chosen medium. Not essay. Not an actual television series starring Sokrates. A poem. Poems make us pause and force us to re-read and think through the conglomeration of thoughts placed before us. The crisis of meaning making falls to us, and the reward for our labor is the knowledge of how precisely Death is No Misfortune. This knowledge will strike us square in the spine and reverberate through our thoughts. For critical thought to surmount the crisis of Crisis, it must reestablish its ties with creative and artistic imagining.

In one way or another, each of the articles in this edition of the Performance Philosophy journal fuses the critical with the creative. You will find poems embedded in the contributions to this special edition, as well as videos, visual art, and scholarly thinkings-through of the multi-faceted deployment of "crisis/*krisis*". Each of the works, even those in which the conclusions seem dire, attempts to shake us free of the thought that thought is itself no longer possible within this never-ending stream of crises. The edition begins with a triptych of the "Greek Financial Crisis". **Christina Banalopoulou** excavates the Nietzschean strand of Deleuze and Guattari's thoughts on crisis to interrogate the logic of "debt" underpinning the clash between Greece and its creditors. By troubling the typically dichotomous relation between the debtor and the one in debt, Banalopoulou deconstructs the given circumstances through which many media outlets sought to convey the Greek people's referendum on whether or not to abide by the financial rules laid down by the European Union.

From there, **Maria Mytilinaki Kennedy** steers us into the conjuncture of the 'Greek Financial Crisis' and Greek theatre by examining the botched appointment of Jan Fabre as director of the Greek Festival in 2016. Mytilinaki Kennedy's strategy for this examination is historical, insofar as she approaches the Fabre misplacement from Adamantios Korais's principle of *metakénosis*, which served as a crucial historiographical tool during the Greek Enlightenment. By plotting the trajectory from Korais's time to the present, Mytilinaki Kennedy unearths the conditions that led to the revolt against Fabre and, simultaneously, reveals a cultural-critical dimension to the so-called Greek Crisis.

Finally, **Andreea S. Micu**'s contribution provides the third panel of the Greek triptych with her essay, 'Photographing the End of the World: Capitalist Temporality, Crisis, and the Performativity of Visual Objects.' In this work, Micu highlights the photographic work of a Greek artistic group called 'Depression Era', which sought to create an alternative archive of the Greek Crisis, one that

did not capitulate to readymade narratives of debt, financialization, and cultural poverty. Drawing on the work of D. Soyini Madison and Joshua Chambers-Letson, Micu reads the affective force of specific photographs and reveals glimpses of temporalities un beholden to capitalist logic.

The next two essays remain tethered to Greece and its classical heritage through the keyword “tragedy”. **Kate Katafiasz** brings a psychoanalytic perspective to the materials of the *skene* and *proskene* in classical tragedy. After first recognizing these scenographic elements as limens mediating the fictional worlds of the dramatic action and the historical reality of the Ancient Greek polis, Katafiasz then hones in on the dialectic of sight and blindness so crucial to dramatic revelation. The result is a penetrating analysis of the role of crisis within the interplay of dramatic blindness and spectatorial insight. After this essay, **Hannah Lammin** pursues the Ancient Greek paradigm of tragedy into the realm of Human Rights discourse, specifically the work of Werner Hamacher. Lammin contends that Hamacher’s criticism of human rights discourse, while necessary and innovative, stops short of pursuing its full course. To see the plot through to the end, Lammin employs the non-philosophy of François Laruelle to radicalize Hamacher’s classical literary foundations and advance a ‘performance-fiction’ of the generic human. The stakes of this argument arise in the need to surpass a purely juridical definition of humanity, and this challenge motivates Lammin to shine François Laruelle’s creative philosophy on not only Hamacher’s discourse but also the performance theory of Erika Fischer-Lichte. The end result is a theory of non-decisional judgement that reveals yet another angle of the Ancient Greek notion of *krisis*.

**Joel White** and **Jasper Delbecke** continue the historical analysis of this suite of papers, but their focus brings our attention to twentieth-century paradigms. For White, the primary question is that of Artaud and his so-called “madness”. Cleverly, White parries the oft-cited paradigm of Artaudian insanity by summoning the unquestionable rationality of Immanuel Kant. His purpose in this juxtaposition is to expose a wisp of what White terms ‘anarchic reflection’ within Kant’s *Critiques*, a wisp that receives its proper substantiation from Artaud’s philosophical ruminations and his Theatre of Cruelty. White argues that we must read Kant with Artaud in order ‘to understand better how the Theatre of Cruelty functions as a cruel crisis of the *krisis* of Form.’ Delbecke, while departing from the gravitational field of Artaud, summons an equally well known aesthetico-historical paradigm in order to locate new terrain for thought. The paradigm in question for Delbecke is that of the essay. After tracing Montaigne’s original work with the essay form and citing both Adorno’s and Lukács’s addenda to Montaigne’s initial forays, Delbecke seeks a theatrical analogue to the essay in the contemporary documentary performance of Belgian theatre makers Silke Huysmans and Hannes Dereere. By offering neither Truth nor Totality in its form of judgement, the essay, for Delbecke, offers the Belgian theatre-makers a means for bypassing binary—good/bad, right/wrong—narrative structures when assessing an environmental and social catastrophe in a mining town in Brazil. For both White and Delbecke, the form of thought receives a critical jolt after considering how *krisis* itself constitutes theatrical thinking.

We follow the thread of critical climate change into the next essay, where **Jeanne Tiehen** brings our focus to the temporality governing the epistemological framework surrounding both media representation and the popular uptake of rising global temperatures. The keystone of this

framework is presentism and the guiding philosophical light is phenomenology, which, for Tiehen, helps us interrogate the seduction of “presentist” thinking. After sculpting a phenomenological method capable of revealing the illusions of presentism, Tiehen turns to two plays that demonstrate a model of critical-philosophical examination capable, perhaps, of persuading climate-change skeptics. Theatre serves a similarly important role in the philosophical thought of **Tony Fisher**’s subsequent article, but the special edition’s theme of crisis gets a red light. Fisher uses the halt in momentum to parade the concept of “impasse”, which, contrary to “crisis” operates in a realm beyond decision. In his own words, ‘Where crisis finds no decision, there we discover the impasse.’ Developed through a nuanced examination of political theology and Blitz Theatre Group’s show *Late Night* (2016), Fisher philosophizes the waylessness of “impasse” and the ecotone of impasse and immanence. Particularly poignant for the ongoing discussion of Brexit and theatrical responses to stultified political discourse in the EU, Fisher’s article offers a detailed map of the no-man’s-land beyond crisis.

Where do we go from here? That might depend on how we imagine what constitutes ‘here’. Love is the answer, we often hear, as in “Love Trumps Hate”. But **Rachel Cockburn** points out that even something as apparently innocuous as the London Southbank’s *Festival of Love* (2016) might be understood as a form of ‘governmentalised love’, seeking to produce ‘the loving subject’. Glossing the critique of love for the state put forward in Gillian Rose’s *The Broken Middle*, Cockburn argues that we should be wary of the ways in which ideals of love are appealed to during times of crisis—what she calls ‘a love regime’—and argues that we need to think love differently, as ‘an ethico-political practice’.

**Thomas Drayton** also attempts a diagnosis of the present moment, engaging with the supposedly apolitical figure of the “millennial”—a generational marker with which Drayton himself identifies. Drayton picks up on the idea of “metamodernism” as a currently circulating term that describes an ambivalent attitude that encapsulates both sincerity and cynicism, suggesting that it might be applicable as a millennial ‘structure of feeling’ (per Raymond Williams). Adapting the title of a book that lays out the tenets of metamodernism, *The Listening Society*, Drayton proposes a parallel in the form of ‘The Listening Theatre’: a socially-engaged theatre practice that is optimistic at the same time as it is self-critical, and is distinct from recent forms of relational aesthetics or dialogical art.

For **Daniela Perazzo Domm**, the present moment is shaped by post-Fordist conditions of labour, within which we face not only an economic and financial crisis, but, as Franco ‘Bifo’ Berardi has written, a crisis of imagination. Entering into vibrant dialogue with dance and performance theorists such as Randy Martin and Bojana Kunst, Perazzo Domm considers the ways in which performance is paradigmatic of virtuosic labour—but also offers modes of resistance and alternative relations with and between bodies. Whereas André Lepecki diagnosed a period of dance practice that utilized exhaustion as a strategy, Perazzo Domm suggests that a more recent shift has returned to movement—exertion, repetition, and rhythm—as exemplified in her analysis by the work of Igor and Moreno and Alessandro Sciarroni. Through what she describes as ‘the



emotional body', these dances 'exceed the logic of exchange and instrumentality by reclaiming their creative, transformative, and relational power,' offering a route to 'another freedom'.

Finally, the [Margins] and ReView sections of this special edition offer even more food for thought. Though not designed to speak necessarily to the main theme of the journal, the five contributions in these sections do indeed provide fuel for theorizing numerous topics outlined in the preceding articles. A group of authors gathered together under the umbrella of the Performance Studies international (PSi) **Performance and Philosophy Working Group** (PPWG) forward a polyphonic symphony titled 'What is Refugee?' Driven by the PSi meeting in Hamburg, the PPWG convened a six-hour conversation around the theme of the Refugee and the loose notion of a 'conference in reverse.' That is, instead of preparing papers ahead of time, the eight authors of the group decided to gather and pursue an improvisational dialogue in order to discern the content of their eventual collaboratively designed essay. After roughly a year of gestation, the result is a fragmentary and definitively uncertain proclamation about philosophical themes subtending the notion of 'refugee', and an analysis of several specific contours to the very real and palpable plight of millions of the earth's inhabitants.

In the ReView section, we find a motley assortment of themes that, nevertheless, hang together within the overarching theme of crisis. A performance spectacle of outlandish proportions in North Korea, an artfully redacted and reimaged deployment of Timothy Morton's *Hyperbobjects*, Spike Lee's comedic and deathly serious critique of blackface in the 2000 film *Bamboozled*, and a repurposed coffee table book from 1980 that serves as 'An accurately illustrated guidebook with theoretical space journeys through the universe.' These are the materials reviewed by **Marc Koscijew**, **Mel Keiser**, **Amma Y. Gharthey-Tagoe Kootin**, and **Matt Martin**, respectively. As a suite of offerings, these ReViews forward the section's aims to rethink what an academic 'review' might look like and provoke you, our readers, into a creative posture from which you might respond. What crises do you glimpse here? What particular form of judgement is prepared by a deliberate and purposeful repeat encounter with a work of art and/or scholarship? Where do you situate yourself within this academic discourse? How does your body register the effects of the both crisis and *krisis*? Wherever you are, and whatever crisis you are reading *from* even as you read *about* crisis, what thinking does this collection make possible?



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## Biographies

Will Daddario is the author of *Baroque, Venice, Theatre, Philosophy* (Palgrave 2017), and co-editor of two anthologies: *Adorno and Performance* and *Manifesto Now! Instructions for Performance, Philosophy, Politics*. He is also co-editor of the Performance Philosophy Book Series (with Palgrave) and an original core convener of Performance Philosophy.

Theron Schmidt is a writer, teacher, and artist, currently living and working on unceded Gadigal land. He has published widely on contemporary theatre and performance, participatory art practices, and politically engaged performance. He is a founding co-convener of the Performance Philosophy network and co-editor of this journal. He is also a frequent contributor and editorial board member for *Performance Research*, and editor of *Contemporary Theatre Review's* online *Interventions* ([www.contemporarytheatrereview.org](http://www.contemporarytheatrereview.org)).

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